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**Illuminating the practice of Knowledge Exchange as a 'pathway to impact'
within an Arts and Humanities Research Council 'Creative Economy Knowledge
Exchange' project.**

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Illuminating the practice of Knowledge Exchange as a ‘pathway to impact’ within an Arts and Humanities Research Council ‘Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange’ project.

Abstract

This article is concerned with the practice of Knowledge Exchange (KE) within the creative economy. Drawing on material collected as part of an ethnographic study of a small creative business support agency – Cultural Enterprise Office – based in Glasgow, Scotland, the article argues for a nuanced consideration of the complexities of doing KE in the creative economy. The study in question was titled ‘Supporting Creative Business’ and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange programme. This article describes the practice of KE, and the role that it might play as a ‘pathway to impact’. I explore the often-mundane activities that constitute KE ‘on the ground’, and argue for further attention to be paid to what I call ‘informal KE’. This article contributes directly to ongoing debates in geography about the effect that the impact agenda is having on academic practice. More specifically, the article examines the role of academics vis-à-vis consultants and other knowledge producers within the creative economy.

Keywords: Knowledge Exchange (KE); impact; creative economy; creative industries; early career researcher (ECR).

Introduction

Knowledge Exchange (KE) has become central to the planning, conduct and evaluation of publicly-funded research in the UK. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

states that the purpose of KE is to “increase the flow, value, and impact of world-class arts and humanities research from academia to the UK's wider private, cultural, and public sectors” (AHRC, 2015: np). KE is also one of the most important routes to ‘impact’, defined by the Research Councils UK (RCUK) as the “demonstrable contribution that research makes to society and the economy” (RCUK, 2014: np). Since 2009, universities have been required to demonstrate that their research has impact as part of their Research Excellence Framework submission, in the form of Impact Case Studies (HEFCE 2009). Consequently, core university funding is increasingly directed to those universities and research centres that conduct ‘impactful’ research, and effectively communicate the economic and societal worth of their activities (Collini 2012). Much of the discussion around impact debates the genesis of this concept, and how it has become central to our lives as academics (Smith et al 2011). A further strand of research questions whether impact represents a threat to academic autonomy (Schlesinger 2013; Slater 2012), and the extent to which this is emblematic of wider economic and political shifts in Higher Education (HE) in the UK. These wider shifts are increasingly referred to as the ongoing ‘neoliberalisation’ of HE. However, given the number of academics working on KE projects around the UK, there are relatively few studies that illuminate these theoretical debates via empirical examinations of ‘actually-existing’ KE (for exceptions, see Moreton 2013, 2015; Williams 2012; Williamson et al 2011). In particular, examination of how academics actually ‘do’ KE is important in order for us to better understand the links between the increasing importance placed on ‘impactful’ research by the RCUK and related bodies and institutional definitions of what it means to be a ‘productive’ academic, as formalised through Universities’ recognition and reward schemes, and inferred more subtly through the working culture fostered within individual departments or research groups (Moreton 2013). In order to illuminate some of these processes, in this article, I take up Comunian and Faggian’s (2014) call to illuminate the

practice of KE, with reference to an AHRC-funded project – called Supporting Creative Business – recently completed at the University of Glasgow. This one-year project was conducted in partnership with a Glasgow-based creative business support agency called Cultural Enterprise Office (CEO), and was funded by the AHRC under their Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange (CEKE) strand. The project analysed how CEO acted as an intermediary between creative microbusinesses on the one hand, and creative economy policy on the other.

I build on and extend work that explores how creative-economic ideas move between the spheres of academia and policy, drawing on my experience of ‘doing’ KE in this context. I lend empirical weight to attempts to theorise the role of academic knowledge in light of the impact agenda, particularly (within this creative-economic context) vis-à-vis the role of consultants (Prince 2010a, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b; Schlesinger 2009). Much of the work that speaks to the ‘new’ research economy – that is, one where academics and universities are under pressure to co-produce knowledge with other public agencies and the private and business sectors - has a tendency to decontextualize the processes of knowledge production and exchange, focusing instead on how knowledge is rendered ‘technical’, and mobile across a range of contexts (McCann 2011; O’Brien and Campbell 2015; Prince 2010a, 2010b). In this article, I take a different tack, describing the day-to-day work of trying to produce and exchange knowledge, in an attempt to account for the complexity that characterises attempts to ‘exchange’ knowledge between academia and other spheres.

Through the examples described in this article, I illustrate the tension between how KE is understood as a ‘pathway to impact’ by RCUK, and how KE actually exists in the field. I show how attempts to exchange knowledge within the creative economy are reliant on the intentions and practices of key actors, the institutional and organisational arrangements within which academics and partners are embedded, the dominant mode of knowledge

production in these contexts, and the local cultural and creative milieu (see also O'Brien and Campbell 2015). I argue that 'official' understandings of KE often assume an unproblematic transfer of knowledge from academics to partners (Bozeman 2000; Williamson et al 2011), leaving little room for exploring nuance in the practice of KE, nor how knowledge might be rejected, contested, or taken up in unexpected ways by partners.

The article, then, explores the emergence of new academic identities under the conditions prescribed by the audit culture in higher education. An ancillary aim of the paper is to add to the body of work that seeks to conceptualise the role of early-career researchers (ECRs) within a rapidly-changing academy. The tension between 'official' and 'actually-existing' KE is thrown into sharp relief when seen from the point of view of ECRs, often employed as contract RAs. RAs are unlikely to be involved in the formulation of grant applications and user-engagement strategies, they are not part of the 'academic elite' that scholars identify as key to the propagation of creative-economic thinking (Prince 2010, 2014), yet they are often charged with delivering KE, and are usually the most visible and embedded members of research teams. I argue that more attention should be paid to processes of 'informal' KE (that is, KE that is done alongside or outside of the formal strategies that structure KE projects, often by embedded researchers).

As will become clear, in order to illuminate the practice of KE, I draw primarily on ethnographic material, gathered largely from my time spent embedded within CEO's offices. I describe both the *intended* and *unintended* consequences of my entanglements with the partner organisation. As such I align myself with recent scholarship within geography that privileges an 'experimental' approach to ethnography, where, as Kullman (2013: 879 my emphases) writes, "experimentation is understood both as an empirical phenomenon and an *orientation to knowledge*" (see also Marcus 2013; Vankilde and Rod, 2015).

From the creative industries to the creative economy.

The UK's long-running focus on the role of the creative industries in ensuring national, regional and local competitiveness is at this point well-examined (Andres and Round 2015; Cunningham 2002). Schlesinger (2013: 29) notes that 'creativity' is often understood as a synonym for "dynamism, growth, talent formation and national renewal", and that its influence in economic, social and cultural life of the UK shows no sign of abating. As Hargreaves (2011) points out in his review of the income-generating potential of intellectual property, the digitisation of cultural and creative products such as books, music, television, film and media is profoundly disruptive to the creative industries, hence the creative and digital industries are, increasingly, inseparable. As a result of this, in recent years the creative industries, in tandem with the digital industries, have been aggregated and 'repackaged', and increasingly fall under the banner of the 'creative economy'.

The aggregation of these industries into something called 'the creative economy' works to create a new focus for policy, and, discursively, to assert the primacy of a mode of income generation built around the trade of intellectual property rights. Additionally, for national and international development bodies such as, for example, the British Council and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the term 'creative economy' also draws attention to the potential of cultural and creative activities to "promote social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development" (British Council, np).

The creative economy is, of course, particularly important in the context of cities.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, 'creative city' policies became the go-to strategies for urban regeneration as cities in the Global North sought to expand their narrowing economic bases after the crisis of manufacturing. In the years since Florida (2002) published his seminal text on the 'creative city', stimulating creativity has become understood as a

panacea for a range of urban problems and increasingly, creative city thinking appears as orthodoxy.

One productive strand of scholarship in recent years has traced the mechanisms by which creative city policies achieved this orthodoxical status. In his work on New Zealand's adoption of creative economic policies in the 2000s, Prince has explored the formation of a global governmental "assemblage" (Prince 2010a: 875) through which creative-economic concepts travel. For Prince (2010a: 876), this assemblage includes state institutions and quangos, and also an ever-changing cast of 'experts' – including academics and consultants – who are instrumental in propagating creative-economic policies, and adapting them to specific national and regional contexts. As Prince (2010a, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b) and others (Chapain and Comunian 2010; Kong et al 2006; Schlesinger et al 2015a, 2015b) have demonstrated, there is an increasing amount of 'traffic' between the spheres of academia and creative economy policy or advocacy, particularly at an elite level.

Doing KE in the creative economy

Of course the links between universities and the creative economy are not restricted to the movement of elite academics. As noted in the introduction, in recent years the pressures upon academics to engage with government and policymakers, and the business community – and to demonstrate quantifiable 'impact' have become more pronounced. Whilst there is consensus that the idea of impact is not new (Staeheli and Mitchell 2005), there is a great deal of disagreement about the extent to which impact, increasingly formalised through the REF and operationalised at a range of scales, might act as a disciplinary mechanism (see Smith et al 2011).

On the one hand, some scholars argue that impact acts as an implicit steer for academics, too many of whom do not give enough thought to non-academic communities when designing and conducting their research (Pain 2014; Pain et al 2011). For these scholars – who approach research design from an activist perspective, and who are leading proponents of the experimental participatory and ethnographic methodologies mentioned above – impact is one way of ensuring that research is no longer produced and consumed within ivory tower institutions. As Williams (2013: 235) has also pointed out with particular reference to research conducted with and within communities in the Global South, under the auspices of the ‘impact agenda’, there is real potential for institutions and individual researchers to do ‘good’, intellectually, ethically and emotionally satisfying work. Williams (2013: 235) goes on to argue that Universities and individual researchers “have the scope to play the impact game in ways that make it less corrosive of academic freedom and solidarity, and to make themselves less exploitative in their relationships with partner organisations”. Williams’ (2012, 2013) critiques bring much-needed nuance, and a subtle shift in perspective, to debates about KE and impact which – to date – have largely been conducted within academic networks in the Global North.

Other authors, however, have argued that, given this increasing focus on real-world relevance, academics are losing their autonomy. Many feel under pressure to fit their research to match the desires of ‘user communities’ (to use the terminology common within the ‘user engagement’ strategies required by many funding agencies) on the one hand, and RCUK on the other. As Moreton (2013, 2015) has argued, for many researchers, these dual pressures are the most visible and intrusive expressions of the broader economic and political changes affecting the HE sector in the UK (and elsewhere). Moreton (2015: 103) notes that the wider landscape of HE funding changes – including extensive cuts to teaching budgets, coupled with a wholesale reorganisation of the tuition fee system for students –

means that, complexly, education is being framed on the one hand as a significant personal investment on the part of students and their families (and one upon which they can reasonably expect returns) and on the other as a “public good” that should serve a wider societal purpose. Within this new research economy, powerful normative constructions of what it means to be a ‘productive’ academic (that is, one who engages in ‘world-class’ research and teaching, whilst also building fruitful relationships with external stakeholders, and effectively communicating their research to the public) also come into play, profoundly affecting processes of academic identity construction.

Within the sphere of specifically creative industries research, the drive to do ‘impactful’ research draws academics further into the multi-scalar assemblage identified by Prince (Prince 2010a, 2010b; see also Schlesinger 2009). Whilst the work of Prince helps us to understand how the drive to engage with government, policymakers, and the business community affects the movement of ideas, there is relatively little work that details the mundane activities and practices that constitute academics’ attempts to ‘do’ KE, and to effect impact (however see Comunian et al 2014; Moreton 2013, 2015; Williams 2012, 2013; Williamson et al 2011). As O’Brien and Campbell (2015) argue, the intentions and practices of those academics who form part of the creative-economic assemblage (particularly those who sit outside of the ‘academic elite’) are often lost or elided with the wider ‘creative economy’ project, making subtleties in critique and interpretation difficult to recover. In detailing the practice of KE insofar as it relates to one, relatively small AHRC-funded project, I highlight the messy reality of academics’ attempts to produce new knowledge within the creative economy.

The enduring influence of ‘knowledge transfer’.

Many models of knowledge exchange are implicitly modelled on typologies of 'knowledge transfer' (Knight and Lightowler 2010; Knight and Lyall 2013). These typologies are key to discussions of knowledge movement and flow within management literatures. Kitigawa and Lightowler (2010: 3), in their comparison of the different KE strategies at play in Scotland and England, note that historically there has been a "relatively narrow commercial focus in terms of *the transfer object*, emphasizing patents, licensing and the creation of spin-offs originating from academic research".

Kitigawa and Lightowler (2010: 3) demonstrate that, insofar as it is currently conceptualised by RCUK, knowledge exchange is a far more diffuse process, stating "today universities are encouraged by various funding and policy instruments to actively engage in the diffusion of research-based knowledge by multiple routes, including [...] 'relationship-based' knowledge transfer activities". Similarly, Knight and Lyall (2013: 310) state that "there is growing recognition that the processes involved are neither unidirectional nor simple, as is perhaps implied in the older phrase 'knowledge (or technology) transfer'".

As I show throughout this article, despite the increasingly popularity and acceptance of 'relationship-based' KE, models of knowledge transfer have left a lasting impression. The increase in the number of knowledge exchange brokers in Scottish universities for example, as investigated by Kitigawa and Lightowler (2010), implies that KE is sometimes still understood as a process of 'translation', whereby someone – and academic, or a broker – simply 'translates' research data into a form valued by the 'user'. In this respect, knowledge within KE strategies may still be understood as something that can be codified, and that may move unproblematically from 'expert' to 'user'¹. Crossick (2006, 2009) has persuasively that

¹ Furthermore, the terms 'expert' and 'user' are of course problematic in and of themselves. Through the discursive construction of these as binary categories, the hierarchy between the University and others (research participants, organisations and institutions that may benefit from research, and the public) is reified.

this model of KE is ill-suited to the complexities and contingencies of collaboration and engagement within the creative economy (see also Pratt 2014). Moreton (2015: 109) articulates the key challengers faced by those academics who engage with pressures to 'impact', noting:

The challenge that has emerged for the AHRC's non-STEM² disciplines is how to take part in [knowledge exchange] activities in manner commensurate with the disciplinary practices and outputs of the arts and humanities disciplines. This is difficult especially given the commercial underpinning of many existing knowledge exchange policies where the cultural outputs of the humanities are less ready to be codified or productised.

Cultural Enterprise Office

CEO is a small, primarily publicly-funded creative business development agency based in Glasgow, Scotland. Its focus is on microbusinesses working within the creative sector in Scotland. When it was launched in 2001, CEO's remit was to support recent graduates from creative undergraduate courses, helping them to become 'business ready' by developing their entrepreneurial skills. In the intervening years, CEO has been shaped by the priorities of consecutive Scottish governments, and other public agencies such as the now-defunct Scottish Arts Council and its replacement, Creative Scotland.

The deep level of dependency between the Scottish Government at Holyrood and the UK Government at Westminster on the matter of the creative economy means that small agencies such as CEO are embedded within an extremely complex and dynamic policy

² Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

landscape (Schlesinger et al 2015a). As such, they have to be fleet of foot in order to keep up with policy directives formulated at a range of scales. Like many intermediaries, they are also precarious – funding is competed for on short cycles, meaning that it is difficult for the organisation to act strategically.

When we entered the field, CEO was a small organisation with bases in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee³. CEO provided information (via the website, or over the phone) to practitioners and microbusinesses in order to help them become ‘business ready’.

Additionally, CEO provided one-to-one advice sessions, and general one-to-many training events across Scotland. Information, advice and events formed the ‘core’ of CEO’s activities, although they also ran a range of competitive programmes that offered more comprehensive and tailored training and support. The organisation was led by the Director and her small team of Senior Managers. The managers oversaw a large team of floor staff (who were responsible for updating the website, relaying information over the phone, and organising events) and the small team of advisers (who led one-to-one advice sessions and fronted training events).

The Supporting Creative Business project

The Supporting Creative Business project was formulated by Principal Investigator (PI) Philip Schlesinger, and Co-Investigator (Co-I) Melanie Selfe – at the University of Glasgow’s Centre for Cultural Policy Research – between 2012 and 2013. I joined the project as a contract RA in April 2013. The initial proposal sought to investigate how CEO operated, as a means to illuminate the key tenets of creative business support. Given that intervention is

³ Please note that following funding cuts in late 2014, CEO now runs with a smaller staff, and no longer has a formal base in Edinburgh. At the time of writing, the organization is in the process of formulating future strategy.

key to many national creative industries strategies across the UK and Europe, there was also the potential to draw out transferable lessons from the case. The proposal also stated that the research team would provide research-based analysis to assist CEO; this was left open-ended in the initial proposal, however in early meetings with the Director and Senior Management team it was decided that we would help to formulate a 'new narrative' for the organisation, which would hopefully help the Director to make the case for CEO's impact on the creative sector in Scotland over the preceding ten years, and ensure further investment from key funders. In these initial meetings, our findings as regards CEO's workings were seen as likely to be of interest both to academics, and to the Director, in that this material was seen as able to inform strategy.

Central to the proposal was a detailed programme of 'formal' KE activities, including three KE events, and a commitment to regular KE-focused meetings between the researchers and the partner. These meetings were designed such that the researchers could discuss findings throughout the project, rather than simply relaying results at the end and as such, they fit the model of 'relationship-based' KE outlined by Kitigawa and Lightowler (2010). Spreading these exchanges throughout the period of the grant meant that we were rarely in a position to present results, rather, often we were presenting works-in-progress, which were not always welcomed by the partner. I discuss the implications of this below.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was ethnography. The methods deployed included participant and non-participant observation, interviews, and document and media analysis. Whilst I was the primary field researcher, all three members of the research team were involved in fieldwork. We have addressed the practicalities of conducting team ethnography

in this case (see Schlesinger et al, 2015b on the Supporting Creative Business project and Clerke and Hopwood 2014; Erickson and Stull 1998; Platt 1976 on team ethnography more generally). As we note in that article, the three-part research team proved very effective in the field, in that our hierarchical structure mapped cleanly on to the hierarchical nature of the researched organisation. Given that we entered the field at a particularly sensitive time for CEO – they were undergoing restructuring, and were facing up to imminent budget cuts – our interactions with the organisation and its staff required great care and sensitivity. As I demonstrate below, this affected how we conducted KE in that on the one hand, it occasionally made feeding back preliminary findings tense and difficult. On the other hand, we were well-placed to conduct ‘informal’ KE, or, KE that arose as part of everyday interactions with the partner.

Building relationships, negotiating networks.

The creative economy is understood as an economic sector that exists within clusters, and circuits or networks of individuals and firms. Recent attempts to better understand and map knowledge flows have focused on the multi-scalar nature of networks, the diversity of knowledge in play at any one time, and the interplay between the creative sector and other economic sectors as regards the transfer of ideas, values and practices (see Hracs 2015). These recent literatures have also attempted to take into account the fact that creative work is often a lifestyle choice as well as an occupational one; within the creative sector the line between work and play is blurred (Gill and Pratt 2008). As Banks et al (2000) demonstrate, trust and investment of time and energy in people who are ‘known quantities’, personally and professionally, is key to the way the creative economy works in practice.

The setting-up of our project relied heavily on the PI's pre-existing contacts and networks (most notably the Chair of CEO's board, and the Director). The fact that the PI was known to key players within the creative sector worked to our advantage in that we were trusted, and welcomed in to the organisation as a team, although of course it took time for us to become embedded in the field.

As the project progressed however it became clear that my personal and professional connections within the creative sector in Scotland were also of vital importance. These connections meant that I was trusted, and could move around the sector with ease (and also move easily back-and-forth between the spheres of academia, and the creative sector), however this came with a number of drawbacks. The extent of my connections within the Scottish creative sector meant that, for some months in 2013, I was never 'off' – to attend a cultural event, say, in Glasgow would likely bring me into contact with CEO staff, or stakeholders in the research, and this meant always being alert to what was going on within the project, and being careful not to let slip any information that colleagues within the partner organisation might not be privy to, and to lightly deflect any off-the-record questions concerning the research team. Whilst all research projects require such discretion, the networked nature of the creative sector – particularly in a 'hub' city such as Glasgow – requires careful positioning on the part of the researcher⁴. In order to engender respect, researchers occupying this creative space have to display connections to academic and policy debates on the one hand, and an understanding of life at the sharp end on the other. Furthermore, they have to be recognised as trustworthy and discreet, but also knowledgeable and willing to share their expertise in line with prevailing norms in the sector (Banks 2006; Banks et al., 2000).

⁴ For complementary work on the potentialities and pitfalls of this kind of 'embedding', see also Moeran and Christensen 2013; Walmsley 2016.

There are three points I want to make here regarding the difficulty of doing relationship-based KE within a heavily-networked sector. The first is that even accounting for the PI's pre-existing knowledge of the partner organisation, and key members of staff, it took time to build a relationship with CEO. Our project was funded by the AHRC for one year, yet the task I was set – to do relationship-based KE in a sector that has a distinctive way of functioning – was incompatible with that timescale. After one year, the PI made the case to the University and the AHRC that dissemination (and 'impact') would suffer were we to stick to the agreed timescale. In the end, the AHRC granted a no-cost extension, the University funded a second year of my salary, and the PI and Co-I continued to put time into the project past the end of their 'buy-outs'.

The second point is that building an effective KE relationship required considerable emotional labour. Other authors have written about the emotional labour often demanded of ethnographers (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Munro 2013; O'Reilly 2012), yet there has been relatively little investigation of how the requirement to conduct relationship-based KE might change the nature of this emotional labour. Given that researchers conducting KE have to orient themselves in relation to formal 'user-engagement' strategies, as well as the aforementioned institutional systems of recognition and reward and the working 'culture' of their host departments or research groups⁵, the balancing act required to safeguard KE and impact whilst also ensuring that research participants feel valued can be exhausting. For field researchers, who do the bulk of the emotional labour of smoothing out relations with the partner, and who are required to act as 'buffers' between academic institutions and the day-

⁵ By way of example, CCPR is well-known within Media and Communications research for conducting policy-relevant and 'impactful' research. As a result, these concepts assume real currency in researchers' day to day lives, as we are often called upon in research team meetings and wider Centre meetings to 'report back' on the progress of our research, and describe our activities using the language of KE and impact.

to-day research activities and relationships, this pressure is exacerbated. A further pressure perhaps specific to ECRs and contract researchers is that, when applying for jobs or promotions, we are increasingly expected to demonstrate local, national and international networks of potential collaborators. As a result, ECRs are under intense pressure to keep partners 'on side' in case they lead to productive future collaborations.

Third, as noted above we entered the field at a time of upheaval for CEO, which resulted in considerable anxiety amongst the staff. In this atmosphere, we had to be sensitive; because this was a KE project, the stakes were, if not higher, then certainly different. In this case, treading carefully was not simply about ensuring cordial relations, but ensuring individuals felt valued and respected, able to speak freely and challenge us where appropriate – in short, we had to keep the potential for 'exchange' open.

Divergent methodologies

In their examination of KE in the music industry Williamson et al (2011) note that a mismatch between participants' demand for relevance and applied knowledge, and academics' demand for methodological rigour and replicability can lead to tension. These authors argue that what 'counts' as useful knowledge for KE partners in the music industry is usually knowledge that enables individuals or firms to gain competitive market advantage or, alternatively (and more in line with RCUK's imagined research impact), knowledge that can inform policy.⁶ A more mundane point that complements Williamson et al's (2011) assertion concerns the potential mismatch between the range of methods commonly

⁶ Williamson et al's (2011) analysis certainly chimes with the experience of the Supporting Creative Business team, in that in our case building up an evidence base for the value of CEO's intervention in the creative economy was a key – though not always clearly articulated – desired outcome for CEO's Director and Chair.

employed by academics and the way that research participants within the creative economy expect research to proceed, which is normally informed by experience of consultancy.

Within the creative sector, consultants are usually hired in order to help management tackle a specific issue, or to make recommendations as regards future strategy. Additionally, as Prince (2012) points out, often, consultants' stock-in-trade is informative quantitative knowledge. Prince (2012: 199) is careful to point out that consultants do of course engage in qualitative research too, however he perceptively notes that consultants' job is – more often than not - to “[tidy] up the mess”, that is, to provide clients with clear, actionable recommendations and ‘hard stats’ that retain their currency when deployed across a range of settings. By contrast, our research was untidy. It had a wider scope, and in order to satisfy the expectations of funders and the partner, needed to theoretically inform: academic scholarship on ethnographic methodologies; the functioning and organisation of the creative economy and the evidence base for intervention in the creative economy, as well as offer insights that might be of use to the partner. Also, as noted above, because of the requirement to conduct KE across the life of the project, we often presented ‘messy’ findings – thoughts, works-in-progress – and took advantage of the (by consultancy's standards) relatively long duration of the project in order to go off on ‘tangents’, in keeping with the iterative mode of research that we were used to.

The extended periods of observation central to ethnographic research sat at odds with the expectations of CEO's staff. Throughout 2013, I spent long periods working within CEO's offices. Most of the time, I was working ‘on’ the CEO project – observing routines, attending meetings and requesting and reading relevant documentation – however, occasionally I was not ‘working’ insofar as some members of CEO staff saw it. In particular, the nature of researching the creative industries involved doing web research, and research on and through social media. One minor, but telling incident occurred early in my fieldwork,

when I was in South Block researching a textiles client of CEO's that I was due to interview. I was scrolling through her website, noting the array of products, their design, their price points, and so on, when I was challenged by a member of CEO staff who questioned whether I was working, or shopping. I attempted to laugh it off, but was mortified that I'd been turned into the centre of attention in the busy office.

This alerted me to the fact that, although CEO had welcomed us in to their space to conduct KE, it was not entirely clear to them what that entailed. Whilst some confusion over what academic research entails is likely within any researched population, the commonplace nature of consultancy within the creative sector exacerbated this confusion. It is unlikely a consultant would be embedded in the office, so CEO staff would only ever have seen the 'meat' of consultancy research, which primarily consists of interviews and perhaps work-shadowing, and the validity of our academic methodology was, at times, questioned.

Somewhat paradoxically however, when the time came to leave the field, we were often asked, "When are you next in?" One challenge of having excellent access was that, when we were not in CEO's office, our absence was noted. In part this was almost certainly due to a further difference between the conduct of academic research and of consultancy – the tangible 'effects' of our research had not been made immediately visible, hence it may have looked as if we had disappeared without producing anything of import. As Pickerill (2014) notes, there is often a mismatch between the timescales of academic research and of partners, with research partners often requiring immediate impact, and academics unable to provide this.

Challenging academic expertise.

In line with the original research proposal, we organised three KE events. All three were held at the University of Glasgow. The first, in November 2013, involved all CEO staff, and represented a chance for the research team to present some preliminary findings. The second was held in January 2014, and involved CEO's Business Support team. The third was held in March 2014, and was outward-facing, attended by CEO staff, policy-makers, academics and creative support agencies from across Europe.

In the initial user-engagement strategy, the PI and Co-I stated that the team would deliver interim and final reports to the Director of CEO. In addition to this, the PI and Director had regular meetings to discuss the findings of the research, and there were three meetings across the life of the research with the full University of Glasgow team and members of CEO's senior management, which allowed us to discuss progress. At several points during the project, our partners challenged the results presented by the academic team. In this section I focus on two instances of this, the first concerns the delivery of the interim report to the partner, and the second describes the confusion that arose relating to the delivery of the final report.

Following negotiation with the Director and senior management team, it was decided that the interim report would extend the findings presented at the first KE event, based on feedback from those present. In the report, we presented a comprehensive narrative of CEO's growth and development, made suggestions concerning the training of CEO's advisers (the small team of full and part time staff who were charged with advising creative sector clients on their business practice) and presented some initial findings regarding the organisational restructure that had taken place in summer 2013.

The bulk of this report was welcomed – in particular, the brief organisational history we presented, gleaned from close document analysis and interviews, was exactly what the

Director needed in order to build a narrative for funders that described CEO's impact on the sector. However as we were writing, we thought this particular section of the report would be most useful for the Director to rally her staff, who were showing signs of fatigue after years of organisational change. We thought our narrative might help reconnect staff with CEO's wider purpose and its founding principles, and that this would facilitate greater understanding around the precariousness of the organisation and its need to constantly shift focus – but this was not the way that our work was taken up.

Other elements of the report were understood by the Director as premature criticism, and were contested. We felt that, based on our observations around CEO, and our interviews with staff, that poor communication around the restructure of 2013 had led to unnecessary confusion for the team of floor staff. Whilst we were confident in our findings, it was clear that at a time of considerable upheaval, the Director did not consider this *useful* knowledge – it did not offer a direction for future strategy, nor material of interest to policymakers – rather it was read as an inconvenience at a time when the Director's attention was turned outwards, not inwards. Additionally, our explicit challenge to her organisational strategy was read as an attempt to undermine her authority at a time when she felt she needed to display leadership.

In light of the tensions that arose around the delivery of the interim report, the PI was keen to carefully manage delivery of the final report, however as the deadline drew near interest from the Director waned and we were unsure of how to proceed. At this time we came under real pressure from the team of floor staff to deliver something that would offer some organisational stability, as they felt fatigued with change. In the event – in light of the fact that our previous report had not been welcomed, and knowing how familiar CEO were with consultancy – we delivered a 'consultancy-style' report, with observations matched

with concrete suggestions, however it turned out that this format was not at all what the Director and senior management team had in mind, and the report was scrapped.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that at this time, the spectre of funding cuts began to loom large, and the Director's attention became focused less on making the abstract case for CEO's utility, and more on keeping the organisation up and running. This meant she became less concerned with our attempts to demonstrate how CEO fitted in to shifts in Scottish, UK and European policy and more concerned with the work that we had done that examined CEO's day-to-day operations, and the impact that they had had on specific sectors, and individual, well-known and internationally-successful Scottish businesses.

However because at this time the Director was concerned primarily with keeping the organisation afloat, communications between the research team and the Director were intermittent, and we stepped back for fear of putting her under extra pressure. The resulting confusion demonstrates the extent to which academic 'expertise' may, when it comes to informing the day-to-day running of an SME, prove impractical – we took an educated guess about what the Director might need, and we were wrong. However, because of our continuing engagement with the field, we did note that many of the suggestions put forward in that report – including those concerning the need to capitalise on and exploit CEO's own intellectual property, the conduct of meetings and the circulation of knowledge within the organisation – became the basis for shifts in organisational strategy.

Making sense of 'informal' KE

It became clear as our research progressed that KE is not simply something that occurs through events, and user-engagement strategies, rather, it also occurs within everyday interactions in the field. As previously noted, ethnographers have long made the case for

recognising the full complexity of researchers' entanglements with the field⁷. Within organisational ethnography, this extends to making the case for recognising the diversity of the field, and taking seriously research scenarios that may at first glance seem unworthy of attention. It also entails recognising that researchers' presence in the field affects the research (and the researched) in multiple ways.

One example that speaks to the potential impact of informal KE concerns CEO's social media strategy. Within the creative sector, social media are often used to make connections between individuals and firms, in an extension of the adage that the sector primarily exists within clusters and networks. When we entered the field in 2013, CEO was unusual amongst its creative intermediary 'peers' in that it did not have a strong presence on social media, particularly on Twitter. As the research progressed we discovered that this was deliberate, and the senior management team were keen to keep it that way. Largely, it stemmed from concerns over maintaining a strong and coherent 'brand image' (social media were seen as introducing an unwelcome element of messiness into this).

CEO used a Tweet-scheduling application to tweet information at pre-defined times. Hence Twitter was used to 'broadcast' information, but clients were not invited to engage with CEO. Many of the clients we interviewed found that unusual, and frustrating. Twitter was used to route clients and potential clients into the core service; at a time of stretched resources, it seemed that CEO could have looked at whether or not it was practicable to pass on information via Twitter rather than suggesting clients call the office.

⁷ This is in stark contrast of course to the early days of ethnographic research, where every effort was made to minimise impact on the field, and arguably to gloss over the effects that ethnographers themselves had on the data collected. Clifford (1983) documents these shifts in his examination of the changing role of the ethnographer, and the breakdown of ethnographic 'authority' throughout the 20th century.

As a researcher embedded within creative-economic research, I use social media a lot in my professional life – as noted above, researching within a particular milieu often entails taking on the conventions of that particular environment. When I entered the field I ‘followed’ all of the CEO staff I could find on Twitter – in much the same way as an academic moving to a new department probably does the same thing – although none of them tweeted about work. The CEO account was similarly quiet. Finding this strange, I raised the subject around the office, primarily with the floor staff in whose team I was embedded. I also made a point of tweeting to, and about CEO, despite the lack of response, and drawing them in to my daily interactions with others in the sector.

After discussion with the wider academic team, we decided that we would include discussion of CEO’s social media strategy in the final report. However, by the time we came to deliver this, we were surprised to find that CEO had advertised a social media management post. The point I want to make here is that, whilst we interviewed members of CEO staff about the social media strategy, at no point did we sit down with CEO and advise that they change it. Rather, a change in strategy was likely brought about by a combination of the ‘background noise’ of other, analogous creative industries support agencies on social media, and by virtue of the cumulative effect of small, informal discussions with individuals who had little or no direct input into strategy. In this case, we can see clearly the multiple twists and turns in the process by which knowledge becomes useful, and the difficulty inherent in trying to assess how much ‘impact’ researchers have actually had.

Conclusions.

In describing the process of conducting relationship-based KE in the creative economy, this article has attempted several things. First, as noted in the introduction, whilst I am

sympathetic to recent critiques of the ‘impact’ agenda, the debate thus far suffers from a lack of nuance. We have arrived at a point where there is little room for a frank discussion of the practice of KE, because at a time of increasing pressure upon academics to capture grant funding, and to demonstrate success at KE and impact, the overwhelming tendency is to report back ‘success stories’. Whilst in some respects, our research could be seen as a success story – we maintained a good relationship with the partner organisation, we impacted their form and function, we have conducted extensive public engagement using the project as a springboard, and we have published widely – the project did not always go to plan, and the process of doing KE was characterised by moments of confusion, tension and exasperation. As Schlesinger (2009b) has written, we need to be honest about the fact that sometimes knowledge is not successfully exchanged – it is resisted, ignored or taken up in unexpected ways. Detailing instances where KE doesn’t go as planned works to problematize the process by which academic research becomes relevant in the sphere of policy or organisational practice.

Much of the critical work that has sought to investigate how creative-economic policy travels has focused on para-state institutions and organisations, and key ‘elite’ actors working within and between these. Rather less attention has been paid to the implementation of creative-economic policy by smaller intermediary agencies, and the attempts of academics – elite or otherwise – to impact their form and function. The second aim of this article, then, is to build upon and nuance important work done by scholars such as Prince (2010, 2012, 2014) by paying attention to the activities and practices of academics working within the sphere of the creative economy, and the ways in which they position themselves in relation to a number of pressures: the strict requirements of funding agencies, the needs of ‘user communities’, implicit and explicit institutional norms, and their own desire to do ‘good’, ‘useful’ research.

Third, I have shown that it is remarkably difficult to demonstrate exactly what impact we, as researchers, are having on the field, for a number of reasons. One potential problem, as Pickerill (2014) has documented, concerns the time-limited nature of research projects; in many cases, only the fullness of time will show what impacts were attributable to research, however the need to report back to funders allows for the capture of snapshots only. As this article also demonstrates, we also need to be more attentive to the importance of ‘informal’ KE, or KE that occurs outside of formal user-engagement strategies. As I have shown, the intricacies of ‘informal’ KE are difficult to capture. In part this is because the information being exchanged as part of informal KE need not be a verbal or written suggestion, rather, it might be a practice that originates with the researcher and is wittingly or unwittingly taken up by the researched; it might be introduction to a new metric, theory or author; it might be a mode of communication or comportment; it might entail brokering connections or friendships or it might lie in all of these things. The assumption that the information exchanged will always take a particular (usually spoken or written) form is, arguably, a legacy of the dominance of programmatic understandings of knowledge transfer. This assumption closes off understanding of the subtle ways in which embedding researchers in the field with the goal of ‘impacting’ the research milieu might play out. It goes without saying that successful KE also relies on both partners knowing that knowledge has been exchanged. This throws up a further issue in relation to informal KE, in that as researchers, we are trained to ‘see’ our impact on the field, however for the researched this will almost inevitably be less visible, making capturing impact problematic.

Difficulties arise when trying to report back on informal KE particularly as this type of KE is often to be conducted by RAs, working full-time on fieldwork, and with less control over what is reported back to funders, and what appears in publications and other forms of dissemination. Additionally, the practice of informal KE, and its effects, might appear vague

and not 'worth' writing about. Moreover, properly accounting for it requires detailed thick description, of the kind that is difficult to incorporate into journal articles (given the constraints of word counts), and is unlikely to be appreciated in end of project reports, media coverage, newsletters or website copy. An ancillary aim of this paper, then, is to conceptualise the role that ECRs play in the conduct of KE, and to demonstrate how the standard modes of planning, delivering and reporting on KE projects leave little room for articulating their labour. Recent work by Gupta (2014) and Middleton and Cons (2014) stresses the importance of contract researchers to the production of academic knowledge given the extent of their immersion in the field; I argue here for extension of this work in order to draw attention to the ways in which the work of ECRs might be crucial to ensuring effective KE, particularly in settings where relationship-based KE is required. It stands to reason that I also align myself with Gupta (2014) and Middleton and Cons (2014) when they argue for greater attention to be paid to the taxing nature of RA work, and the pressure that RAs are under to perform complex academic and relationship-management roles on research projects.

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